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WAR CABINET.

PROPAGANDA AT HOME.

Memorandum by the Minister of Information.

I AM anxious to have the guidance of the War Cabinet upon the formulation of a propaganda policy at home. One of the main functions of the Ministry of Information was defined by the Cabinet last July as follows (W.P. (41) 149, 2/7/41):—

“(b) to publicise and interpret Government policy in relation to the war, to help to sustain public morale and to stimulate the war effort, and to maintain a steady flow of facts and opinions calculated to further the policy of the Government in the prosecution of the war.”

2. At this stage of the war public feeling and the public's reactions to the war cannot any longer be taken for granted. To study them, to assess them and to adjust our publicity to meet them is now a much more important concern of the Government than it was two years ago. Yet this publicity cannot be wholly effective unless it interprets the considered policy of the War Cabinet as a whole and unless the actions of Ministers and Departments generally are consistent with it.

3. It is easy to exaggerate disquieting features by a morbid attention to the various techniques of taking the public pulse. However, making all allowances for overstatements and obsessions, there are some currents of feeling in the country about which there can be no dispute, and I venture to mention two of them.

4. There has been in recent months a widespread decrease in confidence. To some extent this confidence will ebb and flow with the course of events, but we should be altogether too complacent if we merely waited for a run of successes to restore it.

5. There is a prevalent sense of frustration. In some ways this is a good sign, even though an awkward companion. It is a sign of energies unused and enthusiasms unabsorbed, but it also induces a loss of interest in the grim realities of the present. Many people want the war to be over so that they can be free to start on something positive and constructive for the future. They do not find in our present avowed purposes the impulse to a crusade or to a genuine fervour of endeavour.

6. With a view to formulating a propaganda policy which will heal public ailments of this sort as they develop, I should like to suggest for the consideration of the War Cabinet the following procedure:—

- (a) The Minister of Information should circulate to the War Cabinet once a month an appreciation of the state of public morale. This should take into account, in its preparation, the views of any other Departments primarily concerned with the Home front.

[23687]

- (b) This appreciation would contain recommendations as to any general lines which publicity should take in the ensuing month.
- (c) The decisions of the War Cabinet would be taken as a Directive binding on all Departments until further notice.

7. In the meantime I suggest that approval should be given now to the following positive directions on the general lines which Government publicity should follow:—

- (i) There must be more explanation: not only about the armed forces and the war situation but also about production, labour, war-time restrictions and the big problems that affect the life of everyone to-day. When the public is bewildered by something new a failure to explain means the risk of driving a wedge between Government and public, and this fact must be given full weight when security risks suggest the withholding of explanation.
- (ii) We must stop appealing to the public or lecturing at it. One makes it furious, the other resentful. General appeals to the public or particular sections of it to work harder should not be made. There are too many people already working to the limit of their capacity or unable to do so for reasons beyond their control.
- (iii) In dealing with the news it is essential not merely to be but to give the public the impression of being candid and objective. Harm can be done to public confidence by failure to allow for this. An official communiqué must be a report to the public; and every tendency to special pleading should be eliminated.
- (iv) Great care must be taken to deal with any rumours or complaints that have wide acceptance. These are either justified or groundless. If they are groundless, they must be exposed. If they have substance, there must be an authoritative statement, as soon as possible, showing either that their cause is being rectified or that it cannot be rectified, and why.

B. B.

April 10, 1942.
